

INTERVIEWS: Tom Petty • Lenny Kravitz • Orgy

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MOON SON JIMI

**By James A. Hendrix
as told to Jas Obrecht**

Part One: The Early Years

On the 25th anniversary of Jimi's death—to the day—Janie Hendrix called me and said, "Hi. This is Jimi's sister. Now that my dad has won back all of Jimi's legacy, he wants to get his story told before something happens to him."

I'd always loved Jimi's music—ever since I heard "Purple Haze" while I was an altar boy in Melvindale, MI. Sandy Koufax was my first childhood hero, Jimi Hendrix was the second. He's still my all-time favorite musician.

I flew up that weekend and got started. Al and I spent many days together on and off over the next three years, interviewing for hours at a time and going through the family photos and archives. On the second day of the interviews, Al ambled out from his bedroom clutching an archive box. He pried off the top, and inside was a stack of Jimi's original artworks—watercolors, pencil sketches, chalk drawings, comics, etc.—most of them dated and signed. "I've kept these all these years," he said, "waiting to use them in my book." We agreed that the book had to be completely in Al's voice, and I worked hard to capture the rhythm of the language Jimi heard so often while growing up.

My daughter Ava was less than a year old when Al and I began working together, and Al supplied me with heartfelt advice about accepting parental responsibility and raising kids right. Jimi was extremely disciplined—he never could have created so much enduring music if he wasn't—and I came to realize that that spirit had come from his dad.

Al Hendrix is a gracious, thoughtful, and deep man—qualities he shares with John Lee Hooker. He lives alone in a modest and comfortable Seattle home, enjoys visiting with family and friends who call or stop by, watches TV, and still gets on his knees every night to pray, just as he taught Jimi to do. Despite controlling all of the Hendrix fortunes, he's as unpretentious as can be. He likes to order the senior's special dinner down at the local bowling alley, and cranks up Madonna, Prince, and Jimi CDs on his car stereo. It's an honor to know him. —Jas Obrecht



Jimi and I were living at Mrs. McKay's boardinghouse when *[Jimi's mother]* Lucille passed away. Even when we had our own house, Jimi didn't have a whole lot of contact with his mother *[who Al divorced when Jimi was a young boy]*. She wouldn't call up and say she was coming by. She would just sporadically stop by. Maybe two or three weeks would go by and then all of a sudden she'd just pop in any old time.

Later on Jimi and I would talk about Lucille *[who, according to Al, was an irresponsible parent who drank too much]*. Although he probably remembered fun times with her, he never mentioned them a lot. Sometimes he'd say, "Yeah, I had a good-looking mama," and things like that. One time he said to me, "I wonder why mom just didn't take care of herself better." Another time he mentioned, "I wish mom hadn't been the way she was, carrying on and all that."

Jimi loved his mother, but he knew how she was. She loved him, but in her own strange way. She talked about, "Oh, yeah, I have so many kids," but she didn't take care of any of them all the way down, and she didn't have any with her when she died.

Lucille was 32 when she passed away. Jimi might have already been learning guitar by then, but his mother never heard him play. I feel so sad about that.

Jimi started writing poems and ditties before he got into playing music. Then one day when we were at Mrs. McKay's boardinghouse, I went down to the store after I'd told him to sweep up the room.

When I came back he'd cleaned up, but at the foot of the bed was a little pile of broken straws. I said, "Hey, I thought you were supposed to clean up. What are all these straws doing at the foot of the bed?"

Jimi said, "Oh, I did clean, and then I was sitting there making believe the broom was a guitar." He was strumming the broom, and that's where the pile of straws came from.

The landlady had a son who was a grown man. His name was James, too. He had an acoustic guitar, and he'd sit out on the porch and play blues and different numbers. Jimi and I would sit out there and listen. A lot of times when I wasn't there, Jimi would be sitting there listening to him. One day Jimi said to me, "James wants to sell the guitar to me for five dollars, and I'd like to get it."

I said, "Okay." I gave him the five dollars, and that was the first guitar he ever had. It was a right-handed guitar, and at first Jimi started playing right-handed. Then I saw him changing the strings and playing left-handed. I said, "How come you're playing left-handed?"

"I find I can play left-handed easier than I can right-handed."

"Well, do your own thing." I didn't even question it. I just let it go on.

It didn't bother Jimi to have me or anybody else around while he was trying to learn, because he'd be concentrating so hard on his playing. He'd get into it, just like a person plunking away with one finger on a piano. One of the first things that he learned how to play was the theme song from *Peter Gunn*, so even when

he was just starting, he would make music out of the guitar. Who knows—playing guitar could have been his way of working through some of his feelings about his mother.

When people bothered him, Jimi would just go out and get out of sight and sit somewhere and think. He was out with his friends a good deal of the time, too.

Jimi was going to Garfield High School by then and hanging around with Sam Johnson and a kid named Leo—I forget his last name. Jimi also hung around with Sam after we moved to East Terrace, so he knew him for a long time. Sam was a tall, slim, nice-looking kid who played the bass. He probably showed Jimi how to play a few things, and some of Jimi's other friends showed him a few chords. Jimi would pick up a little bit here and there, and he learned a lot of stuff on his own. I never did get him a guitar book or lessons.

He liked to play his guitar out in the yard. Sometimes a kid up the street would come down and they'd play music out in the backyard together. He played guitar behind James Williams, too, because James wanted to be a crooner.

Not long after Jimi started playing gui-



STEVE BANNAS/RETNA

tar, we went down to Seattle's annual Seafair boat race at Lake Washington. We were at my sister's place, where they had a big spread out on the lawn. You could easily walk from their place down to the pits for the boat races. It was all family, and Jimi was there with Sam Johnson. Sam had his bass and Jimi had his guitar. They had been rehearsing some music to play for us, and so they set up and said, "Okay. A little entertainment."

They'd get to playing, and being beginners, one of them would hit a bad note or get a little mixed up. They'd just stop and tell us, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" Then they'd go back over it again and make another goof-up and say, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" That kept going on, so I said, "Okay, you guys, give us our money back!" I was just teasing them, and we all laughed.

Not long after we moved to East Terrace, I got Jimi his first electric guitar at Meyers Music. I also asked them if they had any cheap saxophones, because I wanted to get one for me. They had an old C-melody sax, the kind used in a marching band.

I'd never played sax before that, but I always liked the instrument.

Since people on Terrace were always sitting out drinking beer on their porches, it didn't make any difference about the noise we made, so I'd blow the sax and Jimi'd be plunking on the guitar. I didn't know anything about a sax, so I was just tootin' around trying to find the scale. Jimi would tease me that I was playing the same way you'd see a person trying to play piano with one finger—*ding, ding*. That's the way we both would do it. We were blasting, though Jimi didn't have an amplifier. I never did get him an amplifier, although I'd planned on it. But he got music out of his guitar as it was. When he went over to some of his friends' places, he'd use their amps. He didn't complain about it.

I got behind in the payments on the instruments, and the lady from the store said, "One of them has to go back."

I said, "Well, I'll let the sax go back because Jimi's going to do more with the guitar than I am with the sax. I just got it for enjoyment."

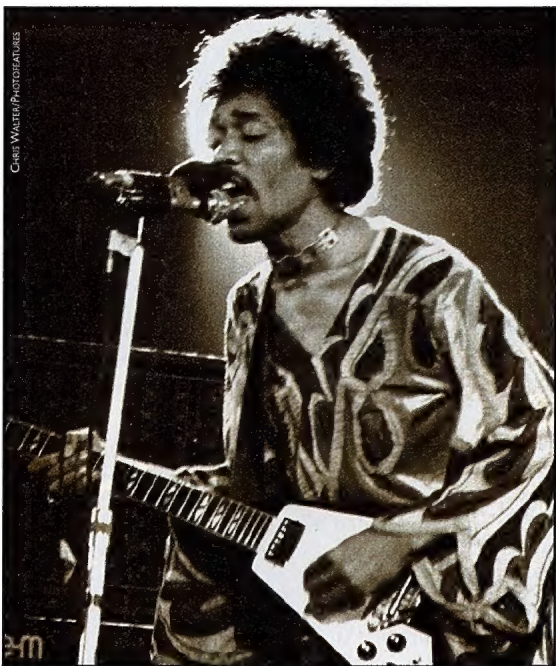
Jimi never took music lessons, but once he got that electric guitar, every day he would be plunking on it. Jimi tried playing lead guitar right away, because the guitar I got him was a regular six-string lead guitar. Jimi always said, "Oh, boy, if I could get to doing like so-and-so on the guitar," and he just worked at it and worked at it, practicing day and night. He played the guitar *every* day. He carried it around with him at all times, although I don't believe Jimi ever took his guitar to

high school, like some people have claimed, unless they had some special class or event where he needed it. I didn't mind it when Jimi began playing in groups because I never did frown on rock and roll. I didn't frown on any music, although I knew of religious Holy Roller types who were against anything that wasn't a hymn. They didn't

want to hear jazz or anything too cheerful. But music is music to me.

I didn't keep up with what Jimi was doing with all of his early musical associates, but I know he joined the Rocking Kings. This was a typical, ordinary, real young teenager band. I saw them play, and they made good music. They played songs that were out around then, like "Yakety Yak," "Do You Wanna Dance," "At the Hop," "Peter Gunn," "Poison Ivy," "Charlie Brown," and "Let the Good Times Roll." I have a photo of the Rocking Kings playing at Washington Hall on February 20, 1960, with Lester Excano on drums, Webb Lafton and Walter Harris on sax, and Robert Green on piano. Jimi's playing his white electric guitar.

I don't know if the Rocking Kings played for any weddings, but they did play for picnics and parties. Jimi did



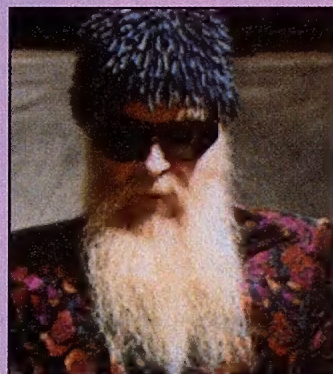
Hendrix Remembered: Some musical greats recall the greatest

by Sean McDavitt

It's been nearly 30 years since Jimi Hendrix left this world, but time has done little to quell the relentless fascination surrounding his short life, remarkable body of work, and unmistakable influence on every rock guitarist who followed. The decades keep rolling by, but the memories remain fresh—and Hendrix remains forever young.

He crossed paths with many in his short life. Some knew him only for a night, others for the duration of his career. But whether they were friends, colleagues, or fellow musicians, those who walked with him remain bound by a common thread: They'll simply never forget him.

Hendrix was, in actuality, a studied, methodical musician, not some freak of nature whose brilliance was simply intuitive. He con-



stantly experimented with styles and sounds, closely studying the recordings of other artists.

ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons, who spent time on the road with Hendrix, remembers: "We were in a hotel room somewhere. It might have been Dallas or Phoenix. A new Jeff Beck album had just been released—it was the Jeff Beck Group, the first one [1968's *Truth*]. Jimi wanted to hear it, and there were few portable record players in 1968, and there were certainly none in the audio visual room of the hotel we were at. A call was made to the hotel lobby—'Hey, we'd like a record player'—and the next thing you know, they're bringing up this console that's the size of an ocean-going steamer. It took three men to carry it. But to see Jimi Hendrix going to this extreme, allowing the room's furnishings to be rearranged so he could hear Jeff Beck, was just something that I found fascinating."



Hendrix's attention to detail certainly extended to the recording studio. Engineer Eddie Kramer worked with Hendrix on

all three Jimi Hendrix Experience records, and vividly recalls the artist's calculating, methodical approach to recording. In short, Jimi rarely recorded without a game plan.

"When he came in the studio," remembers Kramer, "he knew exactly what he was going to be doing. He knew exactly what sound he was looking for, and he would describe it to me in terms of colors. 'Oh, I want like a purple kind of sound.' And I knew after working with him for a while what he was looking for. But the man was very well prepared. He would stay up all night making notes, listen-



ing to tapes and preparing himself so when he came into the studio, he knew exactly where he was."

Blues legend **Buddy Guy** never saw a Hendrix show, but their first meeting—at a New York City club in 1967—was one he'll never forget.

"I didn't know much about Jimi Hendrix, because this thing was just exploding then," remembers Guy. "I went to playin' my guitar up there, acting like a fool, playing with it behind my head and behind my back, and somebody said, 'That's Jimi Hendrix over there!' And I said, 'So what? Who in the hell is that?' Anyway, he came in with an amplifier and a wah-wah pedal and said, 'Man, I've been longing to play with you. Can I sit in?' He sat in, and we clicked right then."

Band of Gypsies drummer **Buddy Miles** remembers his first encounter with Hendrix as well. The two first met in Montreal in the mid-1960s. Hendrix was backing the Isley Brothers; Miles, who has played with an assortment of legendary guitarists, from Clapton and Santana to Beck and Bloomfield, was with Ruby and the Romantics.

"He was playing at a place called the Grand National," says Miles. "I was playing at a place called the Esquire Show Bar. He and a bunch of the guys, about 12 of them, came in. Jimi came in, very dapper looking, even though he did look sort of like the other guys in the band—they all had yellow Tom Jones shirts on. But he was a little different. He had chains on, and his hair was longer, and he had that look about him that told you he was a little bit different from everybody. Jimi was like this: very shy, very subdued, but the man was very, very much about his music—and he would probably be the same way if he was here today."



Singer/songwriter **Janis Ian**, who was with Hendrix, Guy, B.B. King, and others on April 4, 1968, hours after the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated in Memphis, remembers a man who defined the cutting edge: "Jimi was very sweet, very lovely. He just loved to play. He was always so curious about /gear and equip-



Chuck Berry's duckwalk and put his whole body into it while they were performing, but he didn't show off while he was in the **Rocking Kings**. None of them seemed like a showboat to me.

Pretty soon Jimi started telling me about this guy James Thomas, who had drums and all kinds of instruments in his home. James was a grown man, but he wasn't as old as me. He lived in the Central area and had a family. He had a regular job, but he was always into music. He'd get the kids together—10 or 15 of them—and they'd all play instruments.

One time Jimi left me a note saying that he and some of the group had gone to play in Vancouver. Walter Harris told me that the car broke down, and they ended up having to push it. After a whole lot of problems, Jimi just said, "Man, I'm so disgusted, I ain't gonna play with those guys no more." But each time a chance to play came around, he just couldn't turn it down. He'd say, "Well, maybe this time's gonna be better." Jimi had all kinds of hassles, but he always went back for more.

Sometimes the group just couldn't get together and play without one of the guys saying, "You're supposed to do this, you're supposed to do that." The musicians would get to arguing amongst themselves, and Jimi told me that he'd tell them,

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm going out here on the porch, and you guys get yourselves together. Find out who's gonna play this riff and how we're gonna come in. When you get it together, then come and get me."

One of the places Jimi played, the Spanish Castle, was a roadside stop down on old Highway 99 on the way to Tacoma. I've never been in the place, but they had live entertainment. Jimi used to go out there and want to jam with some of the groups. I imagine that's where he got the song title for "Spanish Castle Magic." I don't know what the lyrics mean, though—it don't take a day to get there!

For a while Jimi came home without his guitar. I'd ask him where it was, because he always had his guitar with him. He told me that he left it over at James Thomas' place. I said, "I always told you to bring your things home. You don't leave them around."

"It will be all right over there." I got a little mad, and I finally had to say, "You bring it on home. Tomorrow you go over there and get it. And don't be leaving it nowhere else, because you don't know who comes in and out."

ment], how they worked, and what he could do to make it interesting onstage and make him more than he was before. Jimi was really a hands-on musician and technical person, you know—not a perfectionist, because you can't play like that and expect any perfection from anything but the spirit of it, but he was very involved with all aspects, whether it was the engineering, or the onstage gear, or the way his guitar was set up."



Robby Krieger of the Doors visited with Hendrix en route to one of Jimi's last gigs, the Isle of Wight Festival in August 1970. The two guitarists were on the same flight.

"What amazed me most about him was his ability to play and sing at the same time," recalls Krieger. "He was one of those guys who could, you know, like rub his stomach and pat his head at the same time. I always thought of him as just coming from outer space, because he was just so different. He just came from such a left-field place. He amazed me."

Irish blues guitarist Rab "Coolhand" McCullough, a legend in his home country, opened the first of two shows on Jimi's 25th birthday, November 27, 1967, in Belfast, Northern Ireland. McCullough, who then led a band called Soul Foundation, will always remember that night.

"Was seeing him play a revelation? It was a revolution!" remembers McCullough, who still marvels at Hendrix's incredible spider-like fingers, including a thumb that would reach across all six strings. "The way he made things come out of that amplifier, I thought the speakers were bleeding. They were really just screaming."

McCullough, who saw Hendrix break a water glass with a sonic blast during the soundcheck for the second show that night, was invited back to Hendrix's hotel for a birthday celebration afterward.

"There were about 50 or 60 people in two adjoining rooms, and Hendrix made an effort to say hello to everyone," McCullough recalls. "I was pretty shy back then, because I had a bad speech impediment. But I finally found the courage to speak to him, and I told him that I really appreciated his playing. He said, 'Man, I heard you sing. You don't talk too good, but you sing real well! How do you do that?' He wasn't trying to be funny about it or anything. It was just in the way he said it!"

Band of Gypsies bassist Billy Cox could likely lay claim to having known Hendrix as well as anyone. They served together in the U.S. Army, made music together, and were roommates once their military days concluded. Cox and Hendrix initially shared a home together in Clarksville, Tennessee, before moving to Indianapolis, and then Nashville, before Jimi departed for England. Cox remains in Nashville today.

"He was probably one of the greatest guitar players who ever lived, as far as I'm concerned," Cox says in obvious understatement. "And as I've stated in other interviews, there are two types of guitar players: One who will admit that he's been influenced by Jimi Hendrix, and one who will not admit that he's been influenced by Jimi Hendrix. It's that simple."

Finally he told me his guitar had been stolen during an intermission at the Birdland, [a club where the Rocking Kings used to play]. I got mad because he'd lied about it, but he was afraid I'd blow up if he told me it got stolen. I said, "I guess you're just going to have to wait to get another one."

For a few days Jimi was going around with nothing to do, his hands in his pockets, missing the guitar. Then he went over to my brother Frank's house. Mary noticed that Jimi was down in the dumps, so she said to him, "You go down there and get another guitar at Meyers Music," which he did. I don't know how much she paid for it or if she was getting it on time, but I know he came home with a guitar.

I said, "Did you get your guitar back or something?"

Jimi said, "Oh, no. Aunt Mary, she got this one for me."

"No way! You take it right back to Mary's or the store. You won't get one until I get you one." I just felt that if I couldn't get a guitar for Jimi, there wasn't going to be one. I don't remember how long it took me to get him another guitar—maybe a month or so—but that second electric guitar I got him was the same one I sent to him while he was in the service.

Jimi liked his music, and he liked playing for people. I started to have curfews for him at one time because I just wanted to know where he was at, but after that his band started playing around at different

places that didn't close until one or two in the morning, and that was understandable. I just didn't want him to be going around getting in trouble.

Usually Jimi had two or three buddies he liked to hang around with, but at one time while we were still living on East Terrace he was getting mixed up with a gang. But the gangs back then weren't near as bad as these guys today who tote guns and do a whole lot of bad stuff. The way the gangs worked when Jimi was a kid, if you were running around with the bunch and you didn't do the same things the rest of them were doing, they'd call you chicken.

Some little incident came about involving vandalism, and I said to Jimi, "Now, you have no business doing this."

Jimi said, "The other guys called me chicken! The rest of them ..."

"Look," I told him, "you don't go blindly out and follow everybody else. Don't you have a brain of your own? If you caught somebody jumping off the roof, are you going to jump off the roof, too? Don't be so stupid and do anything like vandalizing somebody's property. You don't want your property vandalized. You gotta think both ways on the thing. And another thing, about them guys calling you chicken—yeah, be chicken. Show them that you have better sense than they have. You have your own mind. Don't follow the crowd. Think it out. Just tell them, 'No, I ain't gonna do that. That's stupid. What are you doing it for?' They're doing



Cox: Michael Ochs

it because somebody else told them to. It just doesn't make sense."

Then Jimi and a friend broke into a place and stole some clothes. When I found out about it, I said to Jimi, "What the heck! Were you going to sell the clothes?"

He said, "No, I was going to give them to the Goodwill or some needy people."

After he pulled that heist, we went and straightened it all out with the store owner. Jimi and I went out to the guy's private home and did some work for him as restitution, but the guy still insisted on paying me for the yard work.

Jimi started going to parties and drinking a little bit—of course, at the time I didn't know anything about it! I did know he smoked, though, because when we lived in that old apartment on East Terrace, we had to use the bathroom down the hall. If I'd go down to the bathroom behind him, I could smell smoke, so I knew he was smoking.

Finally I caught him at it one time after I'd been in the pool hall. It was on a Saturday night, and I came walking down the sidewalk and happened to look up the street and see Jimi with one of his friends, but he didn't see me. I stepped back out of the way, and when they had almost got right up to me, I stepped out. Jimi had a cigarette, and he just *whoop*, tossed it behind him. I had to laugh. I said, "You might as well finish that." He felt all sheepish.

One of my gardening customers worked in a store where they sold record players, so

I got a good deal on one of the first stereos that came out. It was a turntable with two detachable satellite speaker boxes. Jimi would split the speakers apart, set one over on one side of the room and one on the other, and this would give it a stereo sound. The stereo played LPs, 45s, and 78s, and if you pushed a button the arm would swing back to a particular place on the record.

Jimi would put my 45s on that turntable and play along on his guitar. He'd try to copy what he heard, and he'd make up stuff too. He lived on the blues around the house. I had a lot of records by B.B. King and Louis Jordan and some of the downhome guys

while we were living with Willeen Stringer on Yesler Way [circa 1959]. I didn't see Jimi pay too much attention to the radio, but he liked to lay on the floor or sit on the couch and watch TV. Usually when I'd come home from work, he'd be sitting there with the TV on, and then he'd be playing along to the stereo during commercials. When the program would come on again, he would watch that again.

Jimi volunteered for the 101st Airborne and went in the service in May 1961. Other

than living in Berkeley when he was small and that one trip to Kansas with Mrs. Jeter, Jimi had never been out of Washington or British Columbia before. He'd never been on an airplane, either.

First he was sent to Fort Ord, CA. Not long after Jimi went in, the army sent me a letter saying that he had become a sharpshooter, and I don't think Jimi ever even shot a gun before that. He never went hunting, and I didn't have any guns—and if I did, I sure wouldn't have let him shoot them! But they used to do the same thing when I was in the Army—send the news back home to your folks whenever you passed different classes. Jimi wrote me several letters while he was in the Army. I looked forward to getting them, because I knew how it is when you get in the service: You feel like writing every day just so you can get some mail back. When everybody else gets mail but you, you feel bad.

Searching for Jimi Hendrix A tribute in song and words

Jimi Hendrix had a profound impact on a wide range of artists in all genres of popular music. Many of them offer unusual renderings of choice Hendrix songs on the superb *Searching for Jimi Hendrix* (The Right Stuff).

The record features such diverse talents as avant-garde performance artist and composer Laurie Anderson ("1983"), Chicano roots rockers Los Lobos ("Are You Experienced?"), rapper Chuck D of Public Enemy ("Freedom"), Neville and Sheena Staples of the color barrier-breaking ska act the Specials ("Up from the Skies"), bluesman Charlie Musslewhite ("Hear My Train A Comin'"), country singer Roseanne Cash ("Manic Depression"), gospel hand the Blind Boys of Alabama ("Drifting"), and four other acts.

"We're really proud to be in this 'salad' of different interpretations," says bassist Jose Velez of the Latino rock group Los Illegals, who deliver an upbeat version of "Little Wing" that features tasteful guitar stylings by Jim Mankay.

For Los Illegals, whose own original material explores social and political themes, Hendrix's music was an unbridled manifestation of artistic freedom. "He didn't worry about boundaries," Velez notes. "He just did what he wanted."

As for "Freedom," Chuck D's funky, rap-flavored version actually includes some of Hendrix's very own guitar parts from a live show in Atlanta—which the hip-hop wiz extrapolated from a guitar instructional record. Working on the tune offered Chuck the chance to investigate where "Hendrix's head was at, and where his head would be now." He feels Hendrix would have surely embraced hip-hop by now if still alive. "He might have invented it," Chuck says.

Chuck points out that Hendrix showed respect for the guitar—a

crucial instrument for the development of black American music thanks to Delta bluesmen like Robert Johnson—at a time when many other black musicians didn't. "It's just unfortunate that black people disowned the guitar at that particular time [in the late '60s]," the rapper laments. "And it's a shame that in black music, the guitar has been de-emphasized for the last 25 years."

"And let me tell you," he adds, "the majority of the black public doesn't even know Vernon Reid or Robert Cray's names—that's how sad it is. You even have musician magazines specializing in rap and DJ culture asking 'Who's Buddy Guy?' To me that's a travesty and the radio stations are the number-one blame for it, because not only do they refuse to acknowledge the past but they refuse to inform anybody about it."

Neville Staples and his daughter Sheena serve up a horn-filled, ska-flavored version of "Up from the Skies." The way the elder Staples sees it, Hendrix was an indirect but significant influence on the racially integrated Twin Tone ska movement spearheaded by the Specials and championed by other bands

like Madness and the English Beat. Says Staples, "Seeing another black guy up there doing something totally strange and not of the norm, and with white guys on stage with him, certainly stood out with me."

Even for Los Lobos singer and guitarist David Hidalgo, whose rootsy Latin-flavored playing doesn't immediately recall the psychedelic explorations of Hendrix, the record *Are You Experienced?* was a vital influence. "When I was a teenager, my brother brought home the album and it changed my life," he says. "As for the [title song], I think we were trying to do it with respect, and in a way say 'thank you' to Jimi." —Jeffrey L. Perla

like Muddy Waters. I liked most of the blues guitar players and Chuck Berry. Jimi was really excited by B.B. King and Chuck Berry. He was a fan of Albert King too, because he liked all them blues guitarists. Jimi also had some of his own 78s and 45s, but he never did ask me to buy him any records. He would buy his own. I still have some of those 45s he enjoyed playing.

We also had a radio and a television

Jimi wrote me another letter saying he was homesick: "Oh, man, it's such a drag in here." It was the same thing I went through, and when I read his letter I remembered having the same feeling. Of course, he had a girlfriend back home, but hell, I had a wife who was pregnant. Oh, it's just an empty,

lousy feeling. When I read his letters, I knew what they were all about.

Jimi also said he wanted me to send him his guitar. He couldn't take it with him when he first went into the service because they didn't want it interfering with his training schedule. After eight weeks of basic training he could have one, so on January 17, 1962, Jimi wrote me and said, "I hope that you will send my guitar as soon as possible. I really need it now. It's still over at [his then-girlfriend] Betty's house."

Once I sent Jimi his guitar, he met a lot of musicians in the army. That's where he met Billy Cox, who played bass. When Jimi would take a weekend leave and they'd go to town, he'd bring his guitar along and go to clubs and ask some of the guys if he could get in there and play with them. That's where he got a lot of experience.

Jimi and Betty broke up while he was still in the service. I knew this when he came

home on furlough for the last time and I mentioned to him, "Have you seen Betty Jean?"

He said to me, "Betty who?"

Jimi made many successful parachute jumps, and then injured his back while jumping during the summer of 1962. After that he got his medical discharge from the service. Jimi didn't come home to Seattle, and he didn't go to Vancouver, like some books say. He wrote to me explaining that he'd run into a lot of musicians in different places, and he was going to follow his music career. I told him, "Yeah, I know. There's nothing going on back here in Seattle in the music world. If you come back here, you'll just be sitting around idle. There's always a home here for you, but I understand your situation. You want to go out there and see what's happening. That's the way I was. There wasn't nothing shaking at home, so I left Vancouver and came down to the

States."

Jimi wanted to go East and play the chitlin circuit, and so that's what he did. He started traveling around, usually with Billy Cox, who got out of the service a month or two after Jimi. They put together a group right after that. I have a picture of Jimi and Billy playing in Nashville in 1963 at a place called Club Del Morocco. Jimi wrote on the back of it, "Dad, here's a picture of our band named the King Kasuals. We're one of the two best rhythm and blues bands in Nashville." Jimi also told me that he and Billy made a pact: "Whoever makes it will get in touch with the other one and see what he's doing and maybe get him to come and play in his group." Later on, that's what happened. **G**

Next month in part two: Jimi gains fame, touring with the Isley Brothers, Little Richard, and forming the Experience.



Chris Walter/Pearl Pictures